UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2002/NGO/105
6 February 2002

ENGLISH, FRENCH AND
SPANISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Fifty-eighth session
Item 7 of the provisional agenda

THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT

Written statement* submitted by the International Federation of Rural Adult Catholic Movement (FIMARC), a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 January 2002]

---

*This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

GE. *0202010667*

ENG

The Right to Development implies food sovereignty

The concept of food sovereignty is especially important in the current context of globalization, essentially characterized by a maximum level of freedom in exchanges and a growing dependence on a global and deregulated market.

If food security, according to FAO's definition, aims at ensuring "the access for all and at any time to food resources to live a healthy and active life", food sovereignty aims in priority at ensuring to the people of a given country the right to live from their own agriculture and to consume products that match their food habits and culture.

Consequently, it is necessary to differentiate the nature and scope of both concepts. Faced with the urgency to realize the Right to Development, those two concepts do not commit the same way with the same strength the future and responsibilities of the people involved. When the right of people to define their own food and agricultural policies is recognized and when the diversity of food production modes is respected, food sovereignty begins to become an effective right.

Every year, the resolutions on the Right to Development, adopted by the Human Right Commission, reassert tirelessly the importance for all human beings and all the peoples of all countries, especially those of developing countries, of the Right to development. Peasants organizations and the rural movements of the FIMARC totally support the words of the Declaration on the Right to Development, which recognizes that "human being is the central subject of the development process and, consequently, should be considered as the main participant and end-user of the process by all development policies."

The movements of the FIMARC believe that what is good for a human being at individual level must also serve as a reference for any community, population or nation. Consequently, they want to underline the collective dimension of the Right to Development and the need for a real people participation as an essential element of a successful and sustainable development. Thus, they support all initiatives aiming at popularizing the concept of food sovereignty so that it can be the basis of all agricultural policies and so that it becomes a constitutive element of all development processes. All countries and regions of the world have to define their own agricultural policies and it cannot be done by a trade organization such as the WTO. The States and their governments have to define their agricultural policies and it cannot be done by the actors of the market.

A seminar in Thailand

In October 2001, the FIMARC organized a seminar with delegates from Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia. It was held in Chiang Mai (Thailand). The objective was to better understand the point of view of autochthonous people on food sovereignty. After meeting with Indigenous people in various regions of Northern Thailand, the delegates worked with experts to deepen their analysis of the different situations and to immerse themselves in the values, culture and ways of thinking of those Indigenous people.

They noticed that the "green revolution" and the so-called modern agriculture contributed to the marginalization of the poorest farmers and, despite the growth in agricultural production, did not meet the needs for food of the whole population. Thus, the obvious priority for farmers is to make more efforts to have food sovereignty.

Defending food sovereignty means:
- ensuring to populations the freedom of producing what they want;
- ensuring the control over their seeds and know-how;
- making sure that communities can control natural resources such as the soil, water and woods, which are no longer mere possession objects or market values but natural goods that all communities should enjoy freely;
- ensuring a processing and marketing system in order to meet the needs of the whole population, respecting nature and natural resources.

The ruling system is a factor of death

That is why we do not accept:
- the introduction of GMOs in agriculture and genetic manipulations of living bodies;
- patents on living bodies because they lead to the private appropriation of living forms and traditional know-how;
- the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which pollute the soil, water and the air, as well as the use of hormones, animal waste and chemical products integrated in food for men and animals;
- the control of some transnational companies over the ancestral knowledge of autochthonous people, over the diversity of their seeds and medicinal plants.

We denounce the damage of the liberalized market, imposed by international structures like the WTO and we are in favor of a fair trade that respects the needs and aspirations of all communities. We also denounce the neo-liberal and capitalist system, characterized by logics of death and we want to resist individualism that is opposed to community rights and values of Indigenous people.

For another perspective of development

The concerns of Indigenous communities raise questions on development models and their impacts on the environment, on human rights and on the survival of the cultural traditions that condition the future survival of mankind and basic human rights.

In the name of development and "modernization", according to some people, Indigenous communities should abandon their rich social and cultural traditions, their wisdom and traditional knowledge in order to adopt the ruling cultural traditions. Nevertheless, those communities have already been able to evaluate the non-reversible damage that modernity caused to their traditional societies by imposing as a new need a kind of excessive consumption, bringing to the same level a cultural diversity that was their richness, favoring individualistic and profit-oriented attitudes that destroy natural resources and jobs and disintegrate the structure of communities.

Another concept of development is rooted in a community perspective with an exchange of local knowledge and past wisdom. It comes within the frame of a holistic dimension in which values are lived and integrated in all the aspects of life. This way, the will to promote food sovereignty allows meeting the needs of all, respecting culture and in harmony with nature. It gives back their whole dignity to human beings, respecting their values, in the production of quality food and respecting their work.

Breaking with the ruling vision of development does not mean going back with nostalgia to a past that is definitively over. On the contrary, it means opening to a dynamic future that generates life: local knowledge is valued, communities regain their confidence in their own abilities and commit to a sustainable and solidarity development.

A deep change is possible

The current system is mankind's road to ruin. The events of 11 September 2001 and the actions it generated, as well as the thousands of children that die everyday of malnutrition, the diseases caused by the decrease in food quality clearly prove it.

The movements of the FIMARC believe that a deep change is possible. They invite all the people that share the same conviction to operate a total conversion in order to give up a capitalist economy and turn to a social and solidarity economy in which "human beings will be the central subjects of the development process" (Article 2 of the Declaration on the Right to Development).